

Dear Town Meeting Members,

We write as Arlington residents and housing policy scholars in support of Article 38, which would allow two-family homes by right in the current single-family zones. We are both associate professors of political science at Boston University and faculty fellows at the Initiative on Cities, where we specialize in local politics and housing policy. Below, we briefly discuss the academic evidence on allowing multifamily housing across the town.

Recent academic evidence indicates that Article 38 will have a small but positive effect on the housing supply in Arlington, but will not substantially change our neighborhoods.

The evidence on land use regulations is extraordinarily clear. Places with more land use regulations have higher [housing costs](#), and higher levels of [racial](#) and [economic](#) segregation. Indeed, a wealth of studies from urban planners and economists illuminate the construction of more market-rate housing as a critical part of addressing housing affordability (see for example [here](#) and [here](#)). The Biden Administration has made removing regulatory barriers to the development of multifamily and missing middle housing a [central part](#) of the federal government's housing policy.

Another Town Meeting member shared an article by Michael Storpor and Andres Rodriguez-Pose that suggested that increasing housing supply does not help affordability for lower- and middle-income people. However, this work has been rebutted by [Michael Manville, Michael Lens and Paavo Monkkonen of UCLA](#), who extensively review Storpor and Rodriguez-Pose's limited evidence and conclude, based on their own research and the wide body of previous scholarship, that "[t]he evidence suggests that increasing allowable housing densities is an important part of housing affordability in expensive regions."

Additionally, a recent piece from [Harvard's Joint Center for Housing Studies](#) argues that eliminating single-family zoning will enable "a slow process" of multifamily housing development, not large-scale neighborhood change. The Joint Center has published multiple recent pieces (see [here for example](#)) that push for by-right multifamily zoning.

Evidence from other communities that have implemented similar zoning changes, including the states of California and Oregon and the city of Minneapolis, suggest that the effects are quite limited. [This will not cure our affordable housing challenges on its own, but it will help by increasing the housing supply](#). We also need additional support from the state and federal governments to build more affordable housing. The academic evidence is clear. Allowing two-family housing by right will not unleash immediate and massive community disruptions, but it can play a small positive role in adding much needed missing middle housing. Article 38 is a necessary step to making Arlington a more affordable and inclusive community.

Finally, we note that Town Meeting Members have received a deluge of email about this article, mainly in opposition. In our own research [we have documented](#) how a vocal minority opposed to new housing often dominates discussion of housing issues in public meetings, but they are not usually representative of the broader community. Indeed, we observed this same pattern in last year's Town Meeting debate of Article 43, on accessible dwelling units (ADUs). Following a long debate where a large majority of the speakers opposed the article and offered numerous unsuccessful amendments to limit it, Article 43 passed with 80% of the vote. While debate and discussion is important, we should be cautious in interpreting the expressed views as representative of the public.

Sincerely,

Maxwell Palmer, TMM, Precinct 2

Katherine Levine Einstein, former member of the ARB